

# Life Is Hard, but God Is Good

**A testimony of God's goodness through my struggle with depression and suicide**

## **A true story**

*The city lights flash by quickly as I struggle to keep my eyes open. I'm so tired, my body hurts, my mind hurts, and my life hurts. The bright red lights declaring EMERGENCY come into view and the feelings of shame and embarrassment harass me once again. I can't look at the nurse's face as she asks me why I am here. I just want to yell and scream at someone or something, no one understands my hurt. As I tell her I overdosed and I get that look, a look of pity, and disgust, the whispers begin amongst themselves: I need to be put on suicide watch. I know I'm crazy; you're not the first to think so. As I lower my tired, frail body into a wheelchair the stark white halls and smell of antiseptic make me feel alone and all the more hopeless. Just let me go, please, I'm too tired to go on. Anger fills my being as they tell me I didn't take enough to do serious harm, a few more pills and I would've been in worse condition. Teary, pity filled eyes sit near my hospital bed, I can't look at them, I've messed up their lives enough, I've hurt them, confused them, I'm so sorry. If my mind would only stop spinning, if I could just eat and not feel guilty, if I could just feel in control and make it all go away, if life wouldn't be so hopeless and if I could make it stop hurting, I wouldn't be here. I pray in frustration, "Where are you God? Why is this happening to me? Please make my hurt go away!"*

Being diagnosed with depression and an eating disorder is not something a little girl dreams about. I was 18 and had wonderful plans for my life. I had graduated from high school. I had a wonderful boyfriend. I was ready to get married and start a family. And then I was diagnosed with a mental illness, and suddenly my dreams were gone and in their place were nightmares.

The road I was about to travel would be the hardest I have yet to face in my earthly journey. With each step I took I felt blindsided by a myriad of emotions, anger and doubt accompanied by frustration, embarrassment and confusion. This was not what my life was supposed to be like. How did it come to this? Why?

As I stared this trial in the eye I knew this trial seemed to be "unplanned" but it wasn't. Written somewhere in God's story for me, he planned this phase in my life. He knew that I would need to carry this cross at this particular time and for a particular reason. (Psalm 139:15-16: "My substance was not hid from thee when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written,

which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.”) I know that “my life in all its perfect plan was ordered ere my days began” (cf. Psalm 139). In his sovereign control, he knew which events would lead each of us to where we are today. God wrote my story and he knew in his infinite wisdom that by allowing this trial in my life, my faith would be “tested” and strengthened. James 1:2, 3: “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.”

God’s way for me was hard, but I have come to pray that his way would give me the opportunity to help and encourage others. (Psalm 119:71: “It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.”) I have prayed throughout this writing process and I believe that sharing my story is the best way to be a light, a light to mental illness, but more importantly to the wonderful grace of our heavenly Father. This is for anyone who may be struggling. Although our stories may be different and we each have our own crosses to carry, the struggles of this earthly life are all alike and they all are from a loving Father’s hand. (I Cor. 10:13a: “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man.”) This is also for the body of Christ as a whole as we all travel a journey to heaven and strive to bear up one another’s burdens. May my words be an encouragement and an example of the mighty God we serve. He is a sovereign God who alone deserves the praise, glory, and honor for me writing this and I pray that I do this as I share myself with you.

Psalm 18:30a says, “As for God, his way is perfect.” In his perfect plan, he sometimes chooses for his children to experience life in a hard way. The hard way he planned for me was to place wounds in my life as a young person; these wounds hurt me deeply and seemed to turn my life upside down. Wounds, whether emotional or physical, need attention and medicine to help heal. A mother whose little one has fallen and scraped his knee or gets a cut on his finger knows that wound needs care. She washes the wound, applies ointment, and watches for infection. Anyone who has had a wound knows how painful it may be to clean that wound and let it heal but we know the importance and benefit of preventing infection to achieve complete healing. As physical wounds need care so do emotional wounds.

As a young teenager, I didn’t give my wound proper care. I tried to cover it so that on the outside it appeared as if nothing had ever happened. At times it would fester and the scab would break open a bit but because I didn’t know how to handle it, I’d again cover it, ignore it, and push it away as best I could. But it never did go away and eventually it became extremely infected. It became puss-filled and painful. It was so big, deep, and ugly that I could no longer cover it or hide it. God knew my wound needed to heal and as much as it hurt to rip open the scab, he uncovered it and began to heal it.

I hated how hard it was to begin to heal. I had tried to ignore my wound for years, and if I had a choice I would have left it that way. As God began healing me I had a difficult time dealing with the pain that came along side. I couldn't understand why God placed this trial in my life and why it seemed he was hurting me so deeply. I doubted his love for me, concluding that I had done something to deserve the hurt, that it was my fault and God hated me. With that mindset, life was no longer worth my trying. I became hopeless and sad, and if God hated me, life was no longer worth living.

## **Depression**

Depression is like falling into a very deep dark pit with no visible way out. Not only is this pit deep and dark but it's cold, lonely, and scary. It can also be disorienting, confusing and frustrating. When I fell into this pit I was all of those things and more. It's hard to capture the essence of depression because it is a severe hurt that resides deep inside one's mind and that can be a very hard place to go. Within the confines of depression there is a will at times, a determination, to work so hard to climb out, but only find yourself deeper in that pit. There are times when I was desperate to find answers, to get out. The more I tried the further I fell. I was overcome by hopelessness and sadness that there wasn't an easy way out and the light at the top seemed too dim to keep trying. There were countless moments of exhaustion when I tried so hard to grasp some source of deliverance, and instead felt defeated.

Depression is a lonely place to be. It can be especially confusing for Christians. We serve a God who loves us and we know he blesses us so tremendously that we find it difficult to understand why someone cannot be happy or content with life. We must understand that depression isn't a state of discontentment; it is not that easy. Depression is an illness of the mind. It is a result of the fall into sin. Many struggle with depression, often suffering in silence. It is an illness that is often aggravated by the lack of understanding of what it is.

One of the main causes of depression can be life circumstances which are not handled properly. When we do not respond to God and what he is doing through these circumstances they become too much for one to handle. They can be a combination of past and/or present difficulties; it is as if the body and mind overheat and can't handle the stress. The chemicals in the brain can actually become imbalanced due to emotional and physical episodes that have happened or continue to occur. Sometimes many different stressors over a period of time can deplete the brain of its ability to work properly. The chemicals in the brain can be severely altered leading to depression. When the mind is not working properly it brings feelings of tiredness, sadness, and hopelessness.

During my depression life became painted an ugly shade of gray. There were no colorful flowers to enjoy; all I could see was a field of grass, no longer green and lush, but black as if a wildfire consumed it. I woke daily to this picture, and it tired me not only mentally but physically. I had no desire to go about normal daily activities or to interact with others. I wanted to sleep, not just because I was so tired but because sleep was my only respite. When I was awake the thoughts and the battle of my mind were many times unbearable, never ending. This mental battle made functioning seem impossible. I was more than battle worn: I felt defeated. Hopelessness that life will always be like this brought emotional breakdowns and panic. Many times I wished I could be swallowed up and be done.

Living everyday life wearing the label of depression was a frustrating feat for me. I was relieved that my feelings of sadness could be explained but I was continually frustrated that I was depressed. I tried to no avail to “fix” my situation, to make myself undepressed. I wanted so badly to be a normal teenager. But this was not God’s way with me. He wasn’t just going to relieve me from this right away, no. I would need to work through this, face obstacles, and fall and get back up. Many times it seemed impossible. I admit that in my sin I wanted nothing to do with working through this. It hurt to look at my wounds and I hated how out of control I felt. I grew angry and confused and kicked at the healing process God was leading me through.

The most confusing and frustrating part of the process was my inability to make my mind or body work like I wanted. It took everything I had to just get ready for the day without wanting to crawl back under my covers and die. When I worked, I was barely with it; I couldn’t perform even the easy tasks. I was in therapy or counseling at least once a week and these sessions would tire my emotions and my body. I had no desire to be with friends. I was confused by what my brain could or couldn’t handle and I could no longer see normalcy. I literally lived as if I was watching someone else. And oh how I wished I was someone else. Life had become a deep black hole and I became so engulfed by my depression and so blinded by the pain of life that I became defeated and hopeless. I became suicidal.

## **Suicide and the Devil**

In the midst of depression it is hard to see that life is a blessing or consists of anything good. Life often comes with experiencing the pain of past or present life circumstances. Some turn to drugs or drinking, or self harm to numb the pain. Each seems to be an easy solution to forgetting the pain but in reality it comes back, so extreme and so very real that it lingers like the stench of a dead animal. When one cannot deal with living, she begins to give up and longs to be relieved from the emotional pain. The realness of this pain and hopelessness can turn into a longing to leave this life.

I reached this point just after my 19th birthday. My feet were heavy from dragging the weight of my pain for what seemed like forever and I could see nothing but relief in the arms of death. I drove recklessly, not caring if I got in an accident. I exercised during the hottest time of the day, not caring how it affected my body. I developed an eating disorder, slowly starving myself to death. I would empty a bottle of one of my countless medications into my hand, wondering how many I had to take to kill myself.

And eventually, in a moment of complete hopelessness, I overdosed and tried to end my life once and for all.

If depression is hard to understand, suicide is even more difficult to understand and explain. Edward T. Welch explains the relationship between depression and suicide in his book, *Depression: A Stubborn Darkness*. “For one who is depressed there is a rocky relationship with death. You want it, but you fear it” (195). In most cases that fear is enough to persuade one to not take their own life. But, fear is not lasting and in some cases a moment of desperation can overrule it” (195). Facing the hopelessness of depression and of life’s circumstances can be overwhelming to the point of not knowing how or not wanting to handle it.

Many times in these moments God seems to be hidden or nonexistent. It’s hard to understand why God would let one endure such pain, and one thinks God has forgotten them. Welch says “There is *some* truth in suicidal thinking. When life is examined apart from God, thoughts of death make perfect sense” (196). When one contemplates taking her life she can only think one way and see one thing. She is desperate and when depression and pain seem to overtake life and every thought and action seems to circle around that, it’s hard not to feel desperate for a way out. Welch says “suicidal thinking only sees part of the picture—the part that will confirm its interpretation of reality. If you have thought about suicide, its logic is clear and simple, but it is irrational” (196). In suicide there is a lot of over rationalization of things and everything seems worse than it really is.

About 34,000 people die from suicide every year. Suicide is the 3rd leading cause of death among young adults age 15-24 and 60-75% who committed suicide were majorly depressed (<http://www.afsp.org>). Although these statistics are alarming, it is a wakeup call to us that suicide does happen, and it’s a scary reality that I faced head on.

It’s so easy to judge when we do not know the answers to why or how could this happen. We often wonder what may have caused that push over the edge or easily judge that person’s life. We may never find a clear answer, but we can look at the facts stated and try to understand. There are many who seem to know the answer and it may seem clear cut to those who do not struggle with depression or suicidal

tendencies, but please know that this battle is not easy for one who is mentally ill. There are so many different reasons one contemplates or commits suicide, and many times they are specific to that person. But realizing the pain, hopelessness, and desperation that is always behind suicide gives us a glimpse and a slight understanding of one's thoughts and actions.

In the moment when I attempted suicide, nothing mattered. My body was tired of fighting, and my mind was numb from the ongoing emotional pain. I honestly thought I could no longer handle life and carry the cross God gave me to bear. I was filled with anger and frustration. I was angry at my loved ones for not understanding, I was angry at myself for not having the strength to bear the pain, and I was angry at God. In sin I doubted him, and in my sickness I couldn't understand his way with me. As angry as I was with God, I also had been taught from infancy what heaven was and I knew the promise of everlasting life. I know for many who face pain in life, the thought of heaven and being in perfection is so inviting. The same is true for emotional pain. I know that many who have suffered with mental illness have sought relief, yearning to be with Jesus. I, too, had this desire. I felt so strongly the hurt of this earthly life, but in my sin I was not trusting God with my life, and in sin I wanted to take it into my own hands.

Although we may struggle to find answers to the questions of suicide and as confusing as it may be, we know that behind it stands the devil, clapping and cheering. The devil's antics and games can rule our life and thinking especially in times when it's hard to see the goodness of God. That demon is all too visible in the mind of a suicidal depressed person, and in the moments of extreme pain, he's hard to shut up. (I Peter 5:8: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.") For me, that was all I could see. My anger toward God was too great, and I hated him so much for what I was going through that I was willing to lay my life down for the devil. I know many of you know how close the devil can get to us or how close we can get to the devil, and it gives me shivers just remembering how I nearly took his hand and forsook God. I felt his breath, and for me that was too close for comfort.

The devil's hands may be visible in times of great struggle but we have the reassurance that the devil is never in control. By God's grace, he takes our hands and leads us to himself. With this assurance we know that we have no authority or ability to take control of any part of our lives including our own death. This life is filled with painful wounds and hardships that God allows in order to heal us and to strengthen us. Our lives are full of sin, and the evidence of our enemy the devil is plainly seen as he uses his demons to make us fall in any way he can. Depression is a very real illness that is not the exception to sin. With every trial we face we have temptation, and in those trials the temptation to sin is even greater. The devil tempts us by using

depression to find our weakness and to make us fall. He'll dig his nasty fingers in and work to make us doubt our God and think we can take control of our destiny during these moments. The devil makes us think that we are at our wits end and we have no choice but to give up. The devil is real, our sin is real, and when one contemplates or commits suicide, it grieves God. But, again, he is always in control and his plan is evident.

Knowing that God is in control and has a plan brings comfort to all aspects of life, and when one commits suicide or has a loved one commit suicide, we know that we don't have to wallow in hopelessness. I feel this is important to emphasize because suicide is sin but God is also a God of hope. We hurt deeply when we experience the devil so closely and intimately through suicide but we know that God has a perfect will. Many who have lost loved ones to suicide don't know where to find peace, but we know that in everything we serve the God of peace. We don't condone suicide but look to God who is always in control. He foreknew and he ultimately still is the giver and taker of life. Job confesses this after Satan's first assault on his faith. Job loses everything and confesses that God is in control of life itself, Job 1:21b: "The Lord gave, and the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord." God knew the moment, the method, and the thoughts. If he foreknew that child to be his own, he welcomed that child to his heavenly home. We cannot judge one who commits suicide, for we are not perfect in our actions ever, and God alone is the perfect judge. We have assurance of the forgiveness of our sins and as God hates our sin and the devil, he also loves his children and understands our temptations and our hurt. He is a God who forgives and loves unconditionally. We don't deserve this love or forgiveness but he still gives it to us in his perfect will. Only God knows the heart of his child and he will forgive. (I Samuel 16:7b: "for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.") (Ephesians 1:7: "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.") This doesn't take away our duty to strive to put away our sinful natures and resist the devil, but we can find comfort in our forgiveness and in our loved ones forgiveness.

### **The Enemy's Hold**

*Ephesians 6:12: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."*

As one who has faced depression and suicide I realize how real and close the devil is. He found my weakness and knew my doubts and frustrations, and in that he found a foothold to tempt me and help me fall. When I took my eyes off from God and doubted his will in my life the devil rejoiced. In my struggle I was constantly looking

horizontally, at all my problems, at everything going wrong in my life, when I should have been looking vertically. God knew what he was doing in my life. He planned it perfectly before I was born, I realize now, but in the midst of struggle I was lost in my own world. God was seldom part of that picture. I did a lot of listening to the devil during this time, especially when I attempted suicide. I was very sick, but also my sinful nature made my decision very selfish. I cannot say that I wasn't in a lot of pain emotionally and that life wasn't hard, but because my focus was in the wrong direction that pain and my life felt as if it was unbearable. It felt unbearable because I was ignoring God, I even hated him, and I doubted every aspect of his plan for me. I neglected to find his evidence in my life and lived in pure disobedience toward him. My hurts were painful but they became excruciating when I chose to hate God.

Turning my face from God also meant that I failed to see the pillars he placed in front of me, people in my life who were trying to help me by bringing me to Jesus' feet. In selfishness I thought everything I was going through belonged to me, I was the one who was hurting, I was the one who was wounded, I was the one who had to face weeks of therapy, and I was the one who had to go through this. I had closed my heart and my ears to those around me and was wallowing in my selfishness. God placed so many wonderful pillars to speak truth into my life, but for a time I didn't want to hear it. I couldn't hear it. The devil had his hold on me and was constantly speaking lies into my life when my face should have been facing God and those he placed as pillars in my life.

I carry many scars; they are all a little different. I carry the scars of my wounds, the scars of suicide, depression and an eating disorder, and I carry the scars of the devil's claws. All of my scars have their stories, as do each of your scars. They are ugly and hard to look at sometimes. The scars I hate are the ones the sin and the devil left. I am not proud of the way I chose, I hate my sin, and I cringe at how I so hated God. Each path the Lord takes us down, we have the ability to turn our face by his grace toward him, take his hand, and let him lead us, or take the hand of another, or go on our own way. I didn't take God's hand right away; it took many scrapes and bruises of falling and getting back up. But, by his grace God always has a way of bringing us back to himself and covering the lies of the devil with truth. By his wonderful grace I took the hand that had always been there and was set free from the enemy's hold.

### **The Truth Shall Set You Free**

*Galatians 5:1: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage."*

Truth, God's truth, is the only way to true freedom. I chose to believe lie after lie that the devil and his demons dangled in front of me and found myself imprisoned to the

enemy. This is somewhere I hope to never be again. It's beyond frightening to feel such bondage. We all are aware of such bondage to sin and the devil at one point or another in our lives and it's a place we care not to visit. We also can say with joy that we are captives set free, and dance and praise God as the Israelites did after their deliverance out of the slavery of Egypt. Exodus 15:1b, 2 says, "I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him." God has and always will have the victory, and his plan is always perfect even when it's hard to see that victory banner in sight. Paul in Philippians 3: 14 says, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." The freedom and victory, we know, only comes when we see the truth God so vividly lays before us. It's easy to find truth, but it's another thing to know and believe truth. This is not an easy feat when the race laid before us is difficult. The journey is full of wounds and hurts, and dark times and valleys, and tears and sorrows. God never promised that life would be easy, but he did promise he would never leave us or forsake us. He promised to love us no matter what and to grant us grace sufficient for each moment. (II Corinthians 12:9: "And he said unto me, my grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.")

This life is full of moments when God is teaching his children how he is fitting us into our place in heaven. He is also teaching us about himself. It's not easy thanking God for giving these times in our life; in fact at times I would rather live life cut and dried, but these times are God's way of defining our character. Ephesians 3:16: "That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man." His story for us was perfectly designed and predetermined before we were conceived. He saw each aspect and knew that each moment, especially those hard times would make us more and more ready to be with him. II Corinthians 4:17: "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

As we face each hardship and carry the cross God determined for us, we in our sinful natures so easily question God's reasons and his way. But we must know that these times are his way of showing to his beloved who he is. God is unfathomable. (Romans 11:33: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!") We won't ever know the full scope of who he is until we sit at his feet in heaven, but he continues to reveal himself to us daily. His evidence in our lives is unmistakable, even in those times that he seems far off. As I look back at where God brought me from, I see times when God was so clear and was refining me and teaching me about who he is. In my rebellion

God never took his hand from me; he was showing me his love and providing grace for those times. His touch wasn't always gentle, sometimes it was hard, but it was always in love, and that is many times the way God brings his children to himself.

The lessons that God has taught me in my life so far are so valuable and have changed me. I could write so much more, but I think I've exhausted my time already. If I could share one more thing with you it's that although life is full of valleys, God is still good. He is worthy of all praise and glory for choosing us to be his own. His way in our lives is always good no matter how bad it may seem. I don't know what he has in store for me yet on this earth, but he has taught me even in the time of writing this that his goodness is there even if I believe with blind faith. His goodness is in healing wounds and teaching us to trust him even when life hurts. His goodness is in restoring, receiving and being one who forgives. His goodness also may mean that his way isn't what we expect. He may take to himself a little one we never got to hold and we may not understand it, but we still know that he is good and that he is always faithful. Wherever God has placed us, at whatever stage of life we are in, we humbly thank him and praise him. We trust in the promise that although life is hard, God is still good.

Heidelberg Catechism Question 1: "What is thy only comfort in life and in death?  
Answer: That I with body and soul, both in life and death am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ Who, with His precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation, and therefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me sincerely willing and ready, henceforth to live unto Him."